

# THE V-CHIP: PUTTING RESTRICTIONS ON WHAT YOUR CHILDREN WATCH, EVEN WHEN YOU'RE NOT THERE

## What is the V-Chip and How Does It Work?

The V-chip is a technology that lets parents block television programming they don't want their children to watch. Most television shows now include a rating, as established by the Broadcasting industry. (The rating appears in the corner of your television screen during the first 15 seconds of a program and in TV programming guides.) This rating is encoded into the programs, and the V-chip technology reads the encoded information and blocks shows accordingly. Using the remote control, parents can program the V-chip to block certain shows based on their ratings. If you lose your remote or need help programming the V-chip, contact the manufacturer of your television for a replacement or operating instructions.

As of January 1, 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) required all new television sets 13 inches or larger to contain the V-chip technology. You can usually tell whether your television has a V-chip by looking at the packaging. If you no longer have the packaging, the V-chip option usually appears as part of the television's menu if it is equipped with this technology. Television manufacturers say that the V-chip will add less than one dollar to the cost of producing a TV set. If you want a V-chip but do not want to buy a new television, you can get a set-top box, which works the same as a built-in V-chip. Personal computers that include a television tuner and a monitor of 13 inches or greater are also required to include V-chip technology.

## The Ratings System

In 1996 Congress asked the broadcasting industry to establish a voluntary ratings system for TV programs. The industry did so by creating the ratings system known as "TV Parental Guidelines." This system was established by the National Association of Broadcasters, the National Cable Television Association, and the Motion Picture Association of America.

Ratings appear in the corner of your television screen during the first 15 seconds of each television program. The ratings are also included in many magazines that give TV ratings and in the television listings of many newspapers. Ratings are given to all television programming except news, sports, and unedited movies on premium cable channels. There are six possible ratings that a program can receive:

- **TV-Y**, (All Children) found only in children's shows, means that the show is appropriate for all children;
- **TV-7**, (Directed to Older Children) found only in children's shows, means that the show is most appropriate for children age 7 and up;
- **TV-G** (General Audience) means that the show is suitable for all ages but is not necessarily a children's show;
- **TV-PG** (Parental Guidance Suggested) means that parental guidance is suggested and that the show may be unsuitable for younger children (this rating may also include a **V** for violence, **S** for sexual situations, **L** for language, or **D** for suggestive dialog);
- **TV-14** (Parents Strongly Cautioned) means that the show may be unsuitable for children under 14 (V, S, L, or D may accompany a rating of TV-14); and



- **TV-MA** (Mature Audience Only) means that the show is for mature audiences only and may be unsuitable for children under 17 (V, S, L, or D may accompany a rating of TV-MA).

The TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board makes sure that the rating guidelines are applied accurately and consistently to television programming. The Monitoring Board has a Chairman and six members each from the broadcast television industry, the cable industry, and the program production community. The Chairman also selects five non-industry members from the advocacy community, for a total of 24 members. If you have a complaint about a television show's rating, you can contact the Monitoring Board at P.O. Box 14097, Washington, DC, 20004, or you can call (202) 879-9364. In addition, you can visit the Monitoring Board's Web site at [www.tvguidelines.org](http://www.tvguidelines.org).

On September 5, 2001, Hallmark Channel and The Jim Henson Company donated the Kermit the Frog image to the FCC for use in a promotional campaign to bring attention to the availability of the V-chip. Donation of the Kermit image will help raise awareness among parents of the ratings system for television programming and V-chip technology.

For more information about the V-chip, you can visit the FCC's V-chip Web site at [www.fcc.gov/vchip/](http://www.fcc.gov/vchip/). In addition, you can contact the FCC's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau at the address below, or at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY.

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To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, click on [www.fcc.gov/cgb/emailservic.html](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/emailservic.html).

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